

Diasporian News of Friday, 16 May 2003

Source: Billings Gazette

## Ghanaian teaches Rose Park students how to drum

Billings -- A group of sixth-graders sat in a semicircle in the Rose Park Elementary cafeteria Thursday afternoon pounding out rhythms on African drums.

They tapped the tops of the wooden drums with their fingers, then switched to their palms for a different sound. Each wore a colorfully patterned piece of material tied at the right shoulder.

The musicians took direction from a black man dressed in his native Ghanaian garb, a light-yellow tunic embroidered with brown thread and matching pants. He alternately directed the students and played along with them.

"Some of the complicated rhythm comes from the Ashanti region of Ghana," Nii Okaidja Afroso told the assembly of students, teachers and parents. "I don't know how they're getting it, but they're doing it, and it makes me very happy."

Afroso spent the week working at the school with students in all grades. Different classes took turns Thursday afternoon sitting up front and showing what they had learned.

Afroso said his purpose in Billings was to teach the students on several different levels.

"I came here because I want to spread my culture and cultural diversity to as many kids as I can," he said.

Between pieces Afroso would catch the students' attention by calling out "agoo," (sounds like "ago") to the students. They would respond "amee," (amaa).

"When you go to someone's house, you don't knock," Afroso explained. "You say 'agoo,' which means 'is anyone home,' and if they are, they say 'amee.' "

Toward the end of the assembly, after he changed outfits and shed his shoes, Afroso drummed, performed a warrior dance and sang in his native tongue for his audience. He elicited giggles from some of the youngest students sitting on the floor when he bent down and sang to them.

"I belong everywhere, where anybody calls me, I'm going to show up just for the kids," he said at the end of the performance. "I will come back again next year."

Afroso came to Billings at the invitation of Jeanne Burgoyne, Rose Park's secretary. Afroso is married to Burgoyne's daughter, Michelle, and the two live in Oregon.

Afroso, 28, was born and raised in Ghana, West Africa. He began dancing and drumming at age 15. In 1994, when he was 19, he was accepted as a professional dancer for the prestigious Ghana Dance Ensemble at the University of Ghana's Institute of African Studies.

During his five-year career, Afroso performed and conducted workshops locally and internationally, both with the ensemble and as a solo artist/teacher.

In 1999, he was asked to join a performing group in Portland, and he has lived there since. Afroso now travels and performs on his own, sharing his culture and his artistry with students throughout the United States.

**Comments:**

This article has no comments yet, [be the first to comment](#)